

## RECREATION DESIGNATED USE

### What does the indicator tell us?

**T**his indicator shows the percentage of assessed waterbodies that have attained the swimming and recreation use designated by states and tribes as part of their water quality standards.

States and tribes define their waterbodies, monitor their quality, and report the results to EPA, which publishes the individual and aggregated results in *the National Water Quality Inventory*. According to the 1994 *Inventory*, 77 percent of assessed rivers and streams, 81 percent of assessed lakes and reservoirs, and 85 percent of assessed estuaries are safe for swimming. In addition, 87 percent of assessed rivers and streams, 86 percent of assessed lakes and reservoirs, and 83 percent of assessed estuaries are safe for other forms of recreation.

### How will the indicator be used to track progress?

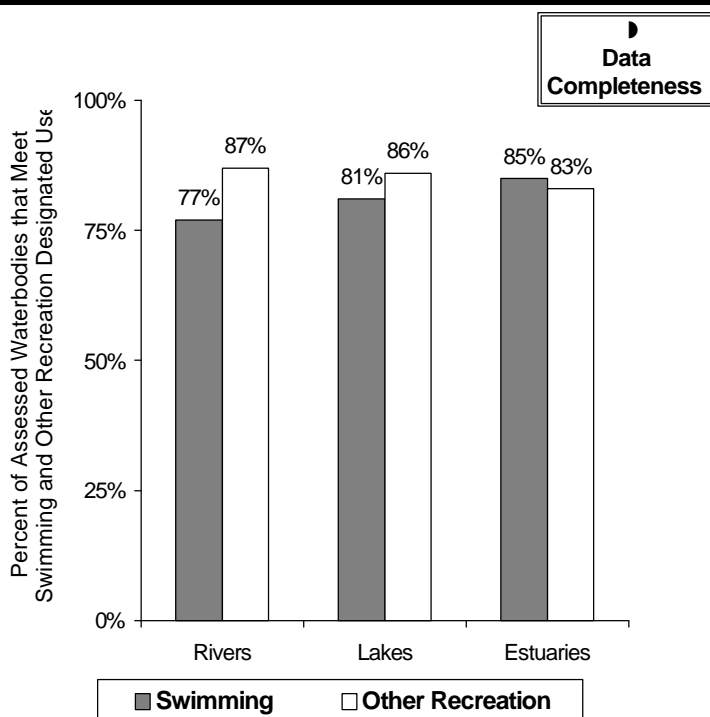
**T**he Clean Water Act requires states and tribes (if authorized) to adopt standards with designated uses for waterbodies or waterbody segments. One of these designated uses is swimming and recreation. Section 305(b) of the Clean Water Act requires that states and tribes assess the degree to which their surface waters support the designated uses. States and tribes report the results of these assessments to EPA every 2 years through the issuance of 305(b) Reports. Data from the reports are then aggregated to form *the National Water Quality Inventory*, which is used to portray the status of the Nation's waters. The results reported in the *National*

*Water Quality Inventory* will be used to track changes in the indicator.

### What is being done to improve the indicator?

**S**ection 305(b) of the Clean Water Act currently requires states and tribes to report water quality monitoring results to EPA. It is important to note that states, tribes, and other

#### INDICATOR 10c: Recreation Designated Use



Source: *National Water Quality Inventory: 1994 Report to Congress*, 1995; 17 percent of all river and stream miles (48 percent of constantly flowing miles), 42 percent of lake and reservoir acres, and 78 percent of estuarine square miles were assessed

**Proposed Milestone:** By 2005, 95 percent of the Nation's surface waters will be safe for recreation.

jurisdictions do not use identical survey methods or criteria to assess waters, in spite of guidelines issued by EPA and developed by the 305(b) Consistency Workgroup, composed of 25 states, 3 tribes, and 7 federal agencies. In addition, most states and tribes do not assess all of their waterbodies during the 2-year 305(b) reporting cycle, and they might even modify criteria or assess different waterbodies every 2 years. In 1994, only 17 percent of the Nation's river and stream miles (48 percent of those which are constantly flowing), 42 percent of its lake and reservoir acres, and 78 percent of its estuaries were assessed for overall water quality.

305(b) data used to support this indicator might not represent general conditions in the Nation's waters because states, tribes, and other jurisdictions often focus on major perennial rivers, estuaries, and public lakes with suspected pollution problems in order to direct scarce resources to areas that could pose the greatest risk. Many states, tribes, and other jurisdictions lack the resources to collect information for nonperennial streams, small tributaries, and private ponds. This indicator does not predict the health of these or other unassessed waters. Because of these limitations, EPA must use caution in comparing data between states, tribes, and other jurisdictions, as well as between reporting periods.

In an effort to improve future reporting, EPA is pursuing several initiatives. First, EPA is working with the states and tribes to more precisely define their recreational uses to differentiate, at a minimum, between contact recreation, such as swimming, and noncontact recreation, such as boating and wading, where immersion in the water is unlikely.

EPA is working with its partners to develop monitoring and assessment approaches that will improve state-to-state consistency in reporting. This will provide a more accurate picture of the Nation's waters when all of the data are aggregated on a national basis.

EPA is working with states, tribes, and other federal agencies to change the 305(b) reporting cycle from 2 years to 5 years, with annual reporting of key data for the waters assessed in each year. This will enable comprehensive reporting of waters meeting designated uses each 5-year period.

The 305(b) Consistency Workgroup and the Intergovernmental Task Force on Monitoring Water Quality (ITFM) are providing guidance and assistance in an effort to improve monitoring, assessment, and reporting.

### **What is being done to improve conditions measured by the indicator?**

**E**PA's *National Water Quality Inventory* shows that states identify agriculture, urban runoff/stormwater, and municipal point sources as the largest pollutant sources for rivers, lakes, and estuaries. The ability of a waterbody to support recreation can be impacted by one or more of these sources.

In addition to continuing to control point sources, EPA and its partners also need to control nonpoint source pollution from both rural and urban areas. EPA encourages states to use a place-based watershed framework to identify the causes of water quality degradation, to determine appropriate controls, and to manage the control programs.

The watershed framework assists water resource managers in reducing stresses on water quality, such as toxic chemicals, nutrients from phosphate-based detergents and fertilizers, and bacterial contamination.

#### ***For More Information:***

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